



File Code: 1950
Date: January 9, 2018

Dear Interested Citizen:

The Mt. Hood National Forest (the Forest) is proposing to develop a programmatic approach for specific aquatic restoration activities across the Forest and has identified you as an individual, agency, or organization that may be interested in this proposal.

Proposed Project

The Forest has streams and rivers that provide habitat for Chinook salmon, coho salmon, steelhead trout, bull trout, cutthroat trout, pacific lamprey, and resident rainbow trout, several of which are federally listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Due to the viability of ESA threatened salmon, steelhead, and bull trout populations on the Forest, action is needed to restore aquatic habitats that have been degraded by historic human practices. Where important aquatic habitat components are lacking, the Mt. Hood National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1990) (Forest Plan), as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan (1994), encourages restorative activities to improve or enhance these areas to better meet specific aquatic habitat needs.

Over the past several years, the Forest has been working collaboratively with local, state, federal, and tribal governments and non-governmental organizations to implement aquatic restoration activities throughout the Sandy River, Hood River, Clackamas River, and other river basins. We have successfully implemented dozens of in-channel and floodplain restoration projects, as well as replacing culverts for enhancing fish passage. These restoration projects have helped restore critical ecosystem processes that have created outstanding rearing and spawning habitat for these ESA threatened and other important aquatic species on the Forest. The Forest's stream restoration work has been recognized with both state and national awards including the 2013 Oregon State Lands Board Award for stream restoration, 2015 USDA National Rise to the Future Award, 2015 and 2016 Western Division American Fisheries Society Riparian Challenge Award, and 2017 Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Joint Conservation Project of the Year Award. With our proven expertise and experience in improving aquatic habitat across the Forest, we strive to continue our award winning level of restoration work through the use of this proposed Forest-wide aquatic restoration proposal. The Forest's success in improving aquatic habitat has largely been due to our valuable partnerships and support from key stakeholders. Therefore, this project also plans to engage and involve current partners, as well as any new, interested partners, in improving aquatic habitat across the Forest.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project is to maintain or enhance watershed health, species recovery and diversity. By restoring aquatic habitats, the Forest can continue to ensure population viability of ESA-listed fish and aquatic sensitive species for generations into the future. The need for fish habitat and water quality restoration is evident when the existing condition of degradation and loss of aquatic ecosystem function are compared to the Forest Plan desired conditions. A Forest-wide aquatic restoration programmatic proposal would provide a consistent approach to increase the efficiency of site-specific analysis and project implementation for aquatic restoration, as well as the ability to capitalize on restoration funding



opportunities. An increased efficiency would aid in the recovery of threatened and sensitive aquatic species located on the Forest, their associated habitats, watershed health, and water quality.

Proposed Action

The Forest Service proposes aquatic restoration on those lands within the boundary of the Forest and potentially any adjacent lands where restoration activities would achieve agency aquatic restoration goals. The proposed action would include seventeen of the project categories identified within the Aquatic Restoration Biological Opinion (ARBO II), which are listed below. ARBO II provides consultation coverage for specific actions under the Endangered Species Act Section 7 and Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The proposed action would incorporate the program administration, general aquatic conservation measures, and project-specific design criteria for aquatic restoration activity categories as described within the ARBO II. Proposed aquatic restoration activities would also be consistent with the Forest Plan, as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan. Restoration actions included in this proposed action would be implemented using a consistent methodology to design, implement, monitor, and provide documentation as outlined in the ARBO II.

The proposed aquatic restoration activities would include:

1. Fish passage restoration (stream simulation culvert and bridge projects; headcut and grade stabilization; fish ladders; irrigation diversion replacement/relocation and screen Installation/Replacement)
2. Large wood (LW), boulder, and gravel placement (LW and boulder projects; engineered logjams; porous boulder weirs and vanes, gravel augmentation; tree removal for LW Projects)
3. Dam, tide gate, and legacy structure removal
4. Channel Reconstruction/Relocation
5. Off- and side-channel habitat restoration
6. Streambank restoration
7. Set-back or removal of existing berms, dikes, and levees
8. Reduction/relocation of recreation impacts
9. Livestock fencing, stream crossings and off-channel livestock watering
10. Piling and other structure removal
11. In-channel nutrient enhancement
12. Road and trail erosion control and decommissioning
13. Non-native invasive plant control (hand and mechanical control)
14. Riparian vegetative planting
15. Bull trout protection
16. Beaver habitat restoration
17. Fisheries, hydrology, geomorphology, wildlife, botany, and cultural surveys in support of aquatic restoration

Prior to site-specific project implementation, the Forest would take additional steps to ensure the effects for each restoration activity have been adequately disclosed for a project. Prior to implementing any restoration activities, a checklist would be completed and reviewed by the local interdisciplinary team. Also, the public would be notified at two important milestones. First, notification of projects would occur through the Forest's website at a minimum of 60 days prior to implementing any aquatic restoration activities. The Forest would consider feedback from the public during a two-week review at the start of this notification period. A second notification to the public would occur upon completion of restoration activities and would describe completed projects for that season. This information would also be posted to the Forest's website.

Your Involvement

The purpose of this letter is to invite your participation during our public scoping process. Comments in support or in opposition are welcome. Specific, solution-oriented comments that focus on the proposed actions or identify issues with the proposals would be the most useful in our planning efforts. In particular, if you have information you feel the Forest Service may not be aware of, or have concerns regarding the project, please send that information in writing before February 13, 2018. Comments received will be used to inform the planning process.

Please send written comments to: Greg Wanner, Supervisory Fish Biologist, Mt. Hood National Forest, Zigzag Ranger District, 70220 E. Highway 26, Zigzag, OR 97049. Comments may also be submitted by email to comments-pacificnorthwest-mthood-zigzag@fs.fed.us in a format such as an e-mail message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc). If you have questions or wish to discuss the projects in more detail, please contact Greg Wanner at 503-622-2002 or gwanner@fs.fed.us.

Comments received in response to this scoping notice, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project and will be available for public inspection and will be released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

The Forest Supervisor will decide whether to authorize the programmatic Forest-wide aquatic restoration project. This project is planned to be completed through the use of the categorically excluded actions listed below, as defined by 36 CFR 220.6. The reasons for analyzing this project through the use of a categorical exclusion (CE) is twofold. First, as stated in the ARBO II, the aquatic restoration projects and activities proposed are predictable as to their effects to ESA- listed aquatic species and consistent with broad-scale aquatic conservation strategies and the best available science. Second, the Forest has conducted analysis for Forest-wide aquatic and watershed restoration with similar restoration categories in previous years. Previous analyses were documented in a Decision Memo and activities proposed were predictable as to their effects to ESA and sensitive species, as well as to other resource areas when applicable project design criteria were in place. Monitoring of those aquatic restoration efforts have documented an increase in naturally complex stream habitats that have directly benefited aquatic species. Additional salmonid smolt out-migration monitoring and spawning surveys have also documented the benefits of those habitat restoration efforts.

For those reasons, it may be appropriate to complete this project through the use of the following CE categories:

- Inventories, research activities, and studies, such as resource inventories and routine data collection when such actions are clearly limited in context and intensity. (7 CFR 1b.3(a)(3)).
- Regeneration of an area to native tree species, including site preparation that does not involve the use of herbicides or result in vegetation type conversion. (36 CFR 220.6(e)(5)).
- Modification or maintenance of stream or lake aquatic habitat improvement structures using native materials or normal practices (36 CFR 220.6(e)(7)).
- Implementation or modification of minor management practices to improve allotment condition or animal distribution when an allotment management plan is not yet in place (36 CFR 220.6(e)(9)).
- Harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction (36 CFR 220.6(e)(12)).
- Restoring wetlands, streams, riparian areas or other water bodies by removing, replacing, or modifying water control structures such as, but not limited to, dams, levees, dikes, ditches, culverts, pipes, drainage tiles, valves, gates, and fencing, to allow waters to flow into natural channels and floodplains and restore natural flow regimes to the extent practicable where valid existing rights or special use authorizations are not unilaterally altered or canceled (36 CFR 220.6(e)(18)).

- Activities that restore, rehabilitate, or stabilize lands occupied by roads and trails, excluding National Forest System roads and National Forest System trails to a more natural condition that may include removing, replacing, or modifying drainage structures and ditches, reestablishing vegetation, reshaping natural contours and slopes, reestablishing drainage-ways, or other activities that would restore site productivity and reduce environmental impacts (36 CFR 220.6(e)(20)).

The analysis for this project would be accomplished by an interdisciplinary team of resource specialists and, if it is determined that no extraordinary circumstances would be adversely affected, the decision would be documented in a Decision Memo.

Sincerely,



LISA A. NORTHROP
Forest Supervisor

cc: Greg Wanner, Brad Goehring, Amber Sprinkle